

Preliminary Concept Paper

for

The ASPIRA TOPS ACADEMY

Submitted by:

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THE ASPIRA TOPS ACADEMY

INTRODUCTION

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is applying to the Newark Public Schools for funding with which to establish a charter school for students in the middle grades (6,7 and 8). The students to be targeted for admission are those who are most at risk of dropping out of school. They will be recruited from middle schools in the North Ward.

The holistic educational program to be provided is designed to help at-risk youths grow academically, as well as physically, socially and emotionally. The program will incorporate the mission of ASPIRA: to educate, counsel, and develop the leadership potential of disadvantaged youths in urban schools, to enable them, as adults, to function effectively in the workforce, to be well-adjusted, informed individuals, and to make a meaningful contribution to the community. The student is expected to meet certain standards of performance. Discipline will be enforced according to the Academy's Code of Conduct.

Using the ASPIRA TOPS (Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students Partnerships) concept as its core, the school will implement programs of child-centered educational partnerships between community based organizations, parents, and school personnel. The school will serve as a one-stop shop in not only offering a multi-faceted program for the disaffected student, but also serving as a resource center providing parents with counseling, information, and referrals to social service agencies who may be able to help them with their particular needs and problems.

The school will be located on the first floor of the ASPIRA building, 390 Broad Street, in Newark. It will consist of 5 classrooms including a well-equipped science room; a small library equipped with computers; a multi-purpose dining room and assembly hall; 2 staff rooms; and a small gym (i.e., a weight/exercise room). Team sports (basketball, baseball, volleyball, etc.) will be conducted in the gym of one of the North Ward schools.

We propose to enroll 50 students. There will be no more than 10 students per class, so that they can be provided with a great deal of individual attention and support.

Statement of Need

Newark's public schools have a very large Latino population and a very high attrition rate. According to the study, "The Dropout Problem in New Jersey's Big Urban Schools: Educational Inequality and Governmental Inaction," published by the Department of Government Services, Rutgers University: In 1991, Newark's high school drop-off rate between the number of students enrolled in the 9th grade and high school graduates 4 years later was 45%. The students tend to be primarily Latino and African American, who live at or below the poverty level. According to the 1990 Census, only 16% of Newark residents are high school graduates.

Low educational levels are closely linked to high poverty rates. The city of Newark, with 30% of its population of Latino origin, fits the profile of the truly poor city and ranks first (1 representing most distressed and 567 the least) on the 1993 New Jersey Municipal Distress Index. Many of Newark's residents face serious problems due to high unemployment rate (10.3%), a per capita income of only \$9,424, a severe housing shortage, rampant substance abuse, the highest crime rate of cities in the country (Uniform Crime Reports, State of New Jersey, 1995), a very high incidence of AIDS, and limited knowledge of English. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, 37% of Newark's children under the age of 18 live in poverty. The percentage of children receiving AFDC in 1994 was 300% higher than the state average. The death rate for Newark teens in 1992 was 133% higher than the State average (Kids Count New Jersey: State and County Profiles of Child Well-being, 1994). The North Ward, from which we shall draw our school population, has an exceptionally high Latino population and poverty rate.

The At-Risk Student

A study conducted in 1994 by Developmental Research and Programs, Inc. OJJD Key Leaders Orientation, has identified the following adolescent problem behaviors that would put a child at-risk of dropping out of school: He/she may be experiencing extreme economic deprivation, with frequent transitions in living arrangements, moving from one apartment to the other. There is no stability in the family and members may have a history of high risk behavior (the use of drugs, criminal activity, etc.). There may be conflicts between parents, parents and children, and siblings. Parents may overlook or sanction a child's negative activity. The child may have demonstrated early and persistent antisocial behavior, have experienced academic failure in elementary school, and lacks commitment in school. He/she may demonstrate alienation and rebelliousness, have friends who engage in problem behavior (such as cutting school), have favorable attitudes toward the problem behavior, and have had early initiation of the problem behavior.

Another survey of school staff members in a number of New Jersey school districts, conducted in 1994 by the Association for Children of New Jersey, states that, "The most serious at-risk problems facing students in New Jersey schools are social in nature, rather than educational." The survey indicated that of the five most serious problems which make students at risk of failure, three are not considered traditional educational issues, but rather social in nature. Nearly 81% of the districts who responded indicated that family problems was one of their district's most serious at-risk problems. Surprisingly, specific problems such as teenage pregnancy, child abuse, and substance and alcohol abuse were not identified as frequently as other socially at-risk problems, such as peer pressure and self-esteem problems.

In view of these and other considerations, the students to be recruited for the ASPIRA TOPS Academy will be those who are not benefitting from the traditional school setting but have not been classified. They will be between the ages of 11 and 14, may have a poor school attendance record, may come from dysfunctional families, are bright but not performing at grade level, have not passed the early warning test, have behavior problems, and/or have parents who have very limited English proficiency. Consideration for admission will also be given to first-time, non-violent offenders.

Recognizing that the student's problems may very likely stem from family problems, a one-stop counseling, resource and referral center will be established to assist parents. Over the years, ASPIRA has developed a good working relationship with many local social service providers, who can provide various forms of assistance (e.g., homelessness prevention, food stamps assistance, employment counseling and placement, vocational training, literacy and ESL programs, mental health counseling, medical aid, substance abuse prevention and/or rehabilitation, etc.).

Comprehensive Curriculum

The curriculum for the courses to be offered will be planned to meet the requirements of the Newark Public School District and the new state-mandated core curriculum standards. The curriculum will be designed to meet the individual needs of the students. A highly individualized curriculum will be prepared for those students who have difficulty learning, as well as the students who are above grade level. The subjects to be offered include English/language arts; mathematics; science; social studies; health and physical education; computer technology; the arts: studio art (including drawing, painting, and crafts); art history and appreciation; a foreign language, probably Spanish; and English as a Second Language.

Crucial to the success of the program will be the mandatory behavior management course, which each student must attend for

one hour per day, five days per week throughout the school year. The course will focus on critical topics related to personal development, including identity and self-esteem; dealing with anger; conflict resolution; peer mediation; effective communication skills; bereavement; and leadership skills and responsibilities. Through a variety of multicultural enrichment activities, students will develop an understanding of and appreciation for their cultural heritage, as well as of the many other ethnic groups in Newark.

Health, Nutrition and Physical Education Programs

Recognizing that children in poor health have difficulty learning, the Academy will foster the health and fitness of students through health, nutrition and physical education programs. Arrangements will be made for a doctor to provide each child with a physical checkup and required vaccinations, once per year, and for a nurse to visit the Academy once per week. The Academy will also conduct an annual health fair providing free screenings to the students' families and other residents in the community. In addition, the academy will sponsor nutrition workshops, conducted by Rutgers University Extension Services. These workshops, available to the parents of the students, will focus on such topics as sound nutrition, budgeting, and meal planning and preparation. Students will have physical education classes twice per week. An After School Program may include such recreational activities as ping pong, table soccer, air hockey, swimming, and board games.

The ASPIRA TOPS Concept

The goals of the TOPS Partnerships are three-fold: (1) to provide assistance and guidance to disaffected middle school students in identifying their own educational and personal growth goals over the school year; (2) to widen the base of adult support for those students in attaining their academic and personal goals; and (3) to foster trust and build direction into the relationship between adults involved in the students' education.

The TOPS process begins with an individual student's goals. A counselor will conduct individual sessions with the student to assist him/her in articulating goals for education achievement and attainment for the coming school year. In addition to measurable attainment and achievement goals (grades, grade completion), the student will identify his/her own specific goals for improvement (i.e., spend more time on homework, reduce tardiness, get more involved in school activities, etc.). These goals will form the basis for the youth to enter into a "contract" with a team of adults committed to helping that student achieve his/her goals.

An adult support team will be created to assist the student through mentoring and academic support. The team will consist of

the school counselor (who will serve as the team facilitator), a school staff person, one of the student's parents (or guardian), and an ASPIRA/AmeriCorps member.

Following the initial goal-setting session between the counselor and the student, the team will meet with the youth to identify areas in which each of them can support him/her in achieving the goals. The team members will each write out their goals for helping the student. These goals will also be developed into a contract in which each party clearly articulates his/her commitments. The team members will meet quarterly with the student to assess progress, discuss ways to improve strategies, and evaluate their own success in supporting the contract relationship.

In implementing the TOPS Program, the school will use materials and resources developed by the National ASPIRA Office and already successfully implemented in a number of schools throughout the country.

The ASPIRA TOPS Academy, will involve students in an exciting "hands-on" course of study and support services designed to stimulate their interest in learning and educational discovery; and to help them acquire the competencies, skills, self-confidence, and positive attitude needed to succeed not only in the middle school, but in succeeding years in the high school, at post secondary institutions, and in the workforce.

**ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey:
Evidence of Experience in Program Design and Development**

Since its founding in 1968, ASPIRA has helped nearly 35,000 New Jersey minority students (predominantly, but not exclusively Latino, to stay in school, graduate from high school, and continue their post-secondary education.

Because Latino students, even those with average grades, drop out of school at significantly higher rates than other students, ASPIRA programs are designed to remove as many barriers to effective education as possible. (National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.) The services offered by ASPIRA supply the support system necessary to help the poorly motivated or inexperienced student overcome these barriers. ASPIRA provides personal educational, and career counseling, leadership development, post secondary placement, guidance and assistance in obtaining financial aid for college.

Since its inception, twenty-eight years ago, more than 90% of the students with whom ASPIRA counselors have worked have completed high school, and more than 80% have continued their studies at a post secondary institution. Thousands of ASPIRA alumni have achieved success in their careers and participate actively in community affairs.

THE ASPIRA TOPS ACADEMY

Introduction/Program Abstract

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The holistic educational program to be provided is designed to help at-risk youths grow academically, as well as physically, socially and emotionally. The program will incorporate the mission of ASPIRA: to educate, counsel, and develop the leadership potential of disadvantaged youths in urban schools, to enable them, as adults, to function effectively in the workforce, to be well-adjusted, informed individuals, and to make a meaningful contribution to the community.

Using the ASPIRA TOPS (Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students Partnerships) concept as its core, the school will implement programs of child centered educational partnerships between ASPIRA, parents, and school personnel. The school will serve as a one-stop shop in not only offering a multi-faceted program for the disaffected student, but also in providing parents with information about and referrals to social service agencies who may be able to help them with their particular needs and problems.

The school will be located on the first floor of the ASPIRA building, 390 Broad Street, in Newark. It will consist of 5 classrooms including a well-equipped science room; a small library equipped with computers; a multi-purpose dining room and assembly hall; and 2 staff rooms. Physical education, including calisthenics and team sports (basketball, baseball, volleyball, etc.) will be conducted in the gym of one of the North Ward schools.

We propose to enroll 50 students. There will be no more than 10 students per class, so that they can be provided with a great deal of individual attention and support.

The curriculum for the courses to be offered will be planned to meet the requirements of the Newark Public School District and the new state-mandated core curriculum standards. Instruction will be provided in language arts; mathematics; science; social studies; health and physical education; computer technology; the arts: studio art (including drawing, painting, and crafts); art

history and appreciation; music (chorus, guitar, piano, recorder); music appreciation (both contemporary and classical); a foreign language, probably Spanish; and English as a Second Language.

Crucial to the success of the program will be the mandatory behavior management course, which each student must attend for one hour per day, five days per week throughout the school year. The course will focus on critical topics related to personal development, including identity and self-esteem; dealing with anger; conflict resolution; peer mediation; effective communication skills; bereavement; and leadership skills and responsibility.

The ASPIRA TOPS Academy, will involve students in an exciting "hands-on" course of study and support services designed to stimulate their interest in learning and educational discovery; and to help them acquire the competencies, skills, self-confidence, and positive attitude needed to succeed not only in the middle school, but in succeeding years in the high school, at post secondary institutions, and in the workforce.

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The TOPS process begins with an individual student's goals. A counselor will conduct individual sessions with the student to assist him/her in articulating goals for education achievement and attainment for the coming school year. In addition to measurable attainment and achievement goals (grades, grade completion), the student will identify his/her own specific goals for improvement (i.e., spend more time on homework, reduce tardiness, get more involved in school activities, etc.). These goals will form the basis for the youth to enter into a "contract" with a team of adults committed to helping that student achieve his/her goals.

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achieving the goals. The team members will each write out their goals for helping the student. These goals will also be developed into a contract in which each party clearly articulates his/her commitments. The team members will meet quarterly with the student to assess progress, discuss ways to improve strategies, and evaluate their own success in supporting the contract relationship.

In implementing the TOPS Program, the school will use materials and resources developed by the National ASPIRA Office and already successfully implemented in a number of schools throughout the country.

MATERIAL TO BE ADDED TO
THE PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL
FOR THE ASPIRA TOPS ACADEMY

Definition of the "At-Risk Student"

Statement of Need

Goals and Objectives

Suggested Time Frame

ASPIRA TOPS ACADEMY

PROPOSED BUDGET

BUDGET CATEGORY

REQUESTED FUNDING

PERSONNEL - full time

School Principal	\$70,000
Language Arts/English Teacher	\$50,000
Mathematics Teacher	\$50,000
Science Teacher	\$50,000
Social Studies/History Teacher	\$50,000
Computer Technology Instructor	\$50,000
Social Worker (MSW)	\$45,000
Counselor <i>ASPIR A Counselor</i>	\$20,000
Secretary	\$20,000
Clerk/Typist	\$18,000

Sub Total Full-Time Personnel	-	\$423,000
Fringe Benefits @ 25%		\$105,750

Total Full-Time Personnel	\$528,750
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PERSONNEL - part time

Administrator/Exec. Director (20% of time)	\$10,000
Program Developer/Grants Writer/ Publicity (40% of time)	\$14,560
Fiscal Officer (20% of time)	\$ 6,600
Art Instructor (Newark Museum)	\$10,000
Music Instructor (after school program)	\$10,000
Physical Education Instructor	\$10,000

Sub Total - part time staff	\$61,160
Fringe Benefits @ 11.15%	\$6,819

Total Part Time Personnel	\$67,979
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CONSULTANTS AND CONTRACT SERVICES

Auditor	\$ 3,000
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FURNISHINGS AND FITTINGS

50 student desks and chairs
6 teachers' desks and chairs
12 computer stands and chairs
6 folding tables
60 folding chairs
1 desk and chair for principal
1 desk and chair for secretary
1 desk and chair for clerk typist
1 desk and chair for social worker
1 desk and chair for counselor
50 student lockers
8 file cabinets
2 staff coat racks
12 bookcases (2 per classroom)
6 bookcases in library
1 bookcase for the principal
1 credenza for the principal
6 blackboards

Estimated Total Furnishings and Fittings	\$35,000
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EDUCATION MATERIALS

Textbooks	\$ 7,500
General Education Supplies	\$10,000

Total Education Materials	\$17,500
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SPACE COSTS, RENTALS, AND UTILITIES

Rent (5,400 sq. feet @ \$6,000 per month)	\$72,000
Electricity	\$15,000

Total Space Costs and Rentals	\$89,000
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CONSUMABLES

Office Supplies	\$ 2,000
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Total Consumables	\$ 2,000
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TRAVEL

Student Travel:

Chartered Buses to: Newark Museum for art lessons, once per week; North Ward School for physical ed. once per week; to places of cultural/recreational interest - 6 times per year.

\$12,000

Staff Travel: To development workshops, conferences, seminars.

\$ 2,000

Total Travel

\$14,000

FACILITIES ACQUISITION & CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

12 Computers @ \$2,000 each

\$24,000

Science Room Equipment (Installation of 5 sinks, microscopes, etc.)

\$10,000

Total Facilities Acquisition & Construction Serv. \$34,000

RENTAL OR PURCHASE OF OFFICE EQUIPMENT

Copier Rental @ \$1,300 per month

\$15,600

Total Rental of Office Equipment

\$15,600

OTHER COSTS

Telephone

\$ 8,000

Postage

\$ 3,000

After School/Club Activities

\$ 1,000

Program Supplies

\$ 500

Advertising/Public Relations

\$ 2,000

Total Other Costs

\$14,500

GRAND TOTAL

\$821,329